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ABSTRACT

This publication provides photographs and the success stories of seven students in Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) in Northwest Ohio. The stories detail the sacrifices, dedication, and hard work that contributed to the students' success, as well as the work of the dedicated, hard-working instructors who facilitated their learning. Subjects of the stories are Roger Brown, who has severe dyslexia; Vanetta McGee, who graduated from high school reading at a third-grade level; Sandy Punches, who wanted to earn her General Educational Development (GED) diploma after circumstances prevented her from graduating from high school; Elysha Fyffe Dennis, who was diagnosed with learning disabilities and dropped out of high school; Paula Kline, who entered a GED class because she wanted to become a nurse; and Yanina Nagornaya and Aleksandr Nagornayy, immigrants from the Ukraine, who attended ABLE's English as a second language classes. Names and addresses of the 31 Northwest Ohio ABLE programs conclude the document. (YLB)

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ED 451 344

# WE ARE ABLE

# SUCCESS STORIES

FROM

## NORTHWEST OHIO ADULT BASIC AND LITERACY EDUCATION PROGRAMS

2001

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J. Bowling

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Department of
Education

Susan Tave Zelman

Superintendent of Public Instruction

March 2001

Dear Reader,

For adults making the sometimes-difficult decision to return to education, we offer these personal success stories. These serve as testimony to the power of the combination of personal courage and learning. The stories are examples of the kinds of changes, personal growth, and improvements in the quality of life that are possible and within reach for individuals and their families. We hope that you find additional support and encouragement for your work and for your friends and family members in these pages.

For persons working in the field of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, share in the joy of these stories. Take pride that we all have a hand in helping to support students through this very personal challenge, journey, and success. Your work is nothing short of remarkable in the many quiet ways that you go about the important business of improving the lives of those with whom you serve.

For policy makers and other stakeholders in the success of our work, know that your decisions and support are making an important difference. These stories are real demonstrations of notable changes that not only affect individuals. You are helping to continue to make significant and long lasting changes and improvements in the quality of life of local businesses, your communities, and families in our state and nation. Use these stories as a reminder of some of the faces behind the nameless reports and data that too often are the only visible indicators of success.

Best regards to all for continued success.

Jim Bowling, Assistant Director
Career-Technical and Adult Education
The Ohio Department of Education

## Compiled by the Northwest ABLE Resource Center, Owens Community College, with contributions from the following ABLE programs:

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  Roger Brown, Student
  Diane Robarge, Instructor

- Read for Literacy, Toledo
  Deena Kaufman, Director
  Vanetta McGee, Student
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- Apollo Career Center, ABLE, Lima
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- Toledo Board of Jewish Education, Toledo
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  Yanina Nagornaya & Aleksandr Nagornayy, Students
  Tanya Borochin, Instructor

# Northwest Ohio ABLE

The following Success Stories are the stories of a sample of students in Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE). ABLE in Ohio provides a valuable educational service to adults. Through federal and state grants, the Ohio Department of Education, Career-Technical and Adult Education Division, provides the fiscal resources and support for 133 ABLE programs and over 75,000 students throughout the state.

**Northwest Ohio** is served by 30 Adult Basic Education and Literacy programs in 31 counties. Over 400 instructors, aides, volunteers, and many more tutors provide ABLE services to approximately 15,000 adult students with federal grants of $2,180,310.00 and state grants of $1,604,952.00 for a total of $3,785,262.00. (16.7 percent of total adult education funding for Ohio.)

Classes are held in schools, libraries, churches, workplaces, and other buildings that are available and accessible. Students progress through a systematic process beginning with an orientation, diagnostic testing, and goal setting. These steps are designed to help students determine the educational needs that must be met to reach their goals and the best educational plan to meet those needs within the ABLE classroom. Students are regularly assessed on their academic progress and attainment of goals. Services include classes that focus on the following:

- **Basic skills** such as reading, writing, and math refreshers;
- **GED** preparation in language arts--reading, math, social studies, science, and language arts--writing;
- **ESOL** for those students who do not speak English as a native language;
- **Workplace education** for those students served directly in the workplace in a collaborative effort between the business partner and the education institution; and
- **Family literacy** that helps parents and children work together to develop stronger literacy skills.

These services are offered by caring professional educators dedicated to helping students better their lives through education. As you read the stories that follow, consider the sacrifices, the dedication, and hard work that contributed to the student's success; also note the work of the dedicated, hard-working instructors who facilitate the learning that occurs. Remember these students have had the support of their instructors and programs and some other important people, as well. **You can be one of those important people.**

# Roger Brown

## Sylvania Public Schools, ABLE Program

## Springfield School Site

Roger Brown has severe dyslexia that causes difficulty with reading and spelling. Letters appear backwards so that words and sounds are difficult to determine since they do not follow the patterns that most of us recognize. Roger dropped out of school when he was in the eighth grade. For years, he compensated for his reading deficiency by claiming that he had forgotten his glasses (a common coping mechanism).

Roger works at MacQueen's Orchard and is a widower with four grown children. It was Roger's children who eventually convinced him to enroll in the ABLE program because he was not setting a good example with his inability to read. So, Roger came to class. As he says, "The hardest part about learning to read was walking through the door and getting started." His instructor, **Diane Robarge**, said that his dyslexia is possibly the worst case she has ever seen. Roger persisted in his studies, and finally earned his High School Equivalency Diploma (GED) after ten years of study, hard work, and determination.

Roger now volunteers in the ABLE program so that he can help others. Ms. Robarge reports that Roger is in great demand as a tutor because he relates so well with other students facing similar difficulties. "They trust him. Roger gives them reinforcement. He knows what they're going through because he has gone through it himself."

Roger has also discovered that he is good with math. As his reading improved, his facility with numbers became obvious. Now, he has become the specialist in helping students read and solve story problems. He has even developed a diagram that is used in story problems.

According to his instructor, Diane Robarge:

> Where do I begin to praise Roger Brown. He is the most amazing man I have ever met. His dedication to learning is testament to what ABLE is all about.
>
> Roger Brown started in the Sylvania ABE program in the early 1980's. He could not read or write. Although Roger is an intelligent man, he has severe learning disabilities, most notably, dyslexia. For much of Roger's life, he was put down for his "dumbness," but Roger was anything but dumb. He had determination to succeed.
>
> When I started in Holland in 1988, Roger would sit in a corner and try to study by himself. He refused help and tried to cover his problems. Eventually, Roger came out of his shell, accepted our help, and slowly began to read. After a while, Roger realized that learning to read was the first step, and he set a new goal for himself. He decided to get his GED. Through dedication and hard work, Roger met that goal. All this was accomplished while working full time and raising a family.
>
> After attaining his GED in 1996, Roger returned to our program as a volunteer. His specialty is math, although Roger has helped students in reading, also. The students ask to have Roger help them since he has been there himself. He has patience and the ability to make students think for themselves. The students joke how Roger will not give them any answers. Students with learning disabilities often bond with Roger and request to work one-on-one with him. He is in constant demand.
>
> Even though Roger works full time and has recently become a widower, he volunteers every Tuesday and Thursday night

to help others become literate, get their GED, and better their lives. Roger is an inspiration to all.

It is very difficult to put in a few words what Roger had done. He came to read, and now he teaches. He is a true success.

The **Sylvania/Springfield ABLE** is a large, friendly program where everyone helps each other. Students enjoy the classroom setting where everyday math, English, science, social studies, literature, and/or life skills are taught in a large-group format. Individual and small-group classes are also available every day. Encouragement and desire to help are the key factors with our staff. Retention and a high GED pass rate are our goals.

ESOL classes are taught, as well. The large classes allow students of diverse backgrounds to learn from each other as well as practice their new language skills. Field trips and a large variety of methods to learn are integral parts of the ESOL classes.

# Vanetta McGee

## Read for Literacy

## Toledo, Ohio

Vanetta McGee graduated from high school reading at a third-grade level. While the teachers worked actively with her, she had no support at home. She joined Read For Literacy in October 1988 so that she could become a Certified Nurse Assistant. After only ten months, she was able to enroll part-time at Owens Community College and begin working part-time in a day care center. Because of these changes, Vanetta and her tutor chose to concentrate on her course work at Owens instead of using the RFL skill books. Vanetta began to see the relevance of her work in her daily life and experienced less stress.

"If you don't have the skills to read, you can't get the job you want," said Vanetta. She is living her beliefs by learning to read better so that she can continue pursuing her educational and professional goals. From the day she enrolled, Vanetta was determined to succeed. With her specific goal in mind, she worked diligently to achieve a higher reading level so that she could complete the class work needed to pass her courses in college.

Vanetta was honored as the Adult Learner of the Year in August 2000 by Read for Literacy. **Dr. Deanna Cedargren**, Vanetta's tutor, said that she has shown "consistently an eagerness to learn. She has a certain

perseverance, desire, and motivation. It is knowing she needs something she can get from Read for Literacy."

Vanetta has sustained that desire to improve her life. She has found employment, but continues her RFL and Owens' classes. She is an active participant in her learning and is working toward greater independence. She is now able to express her thoughts and ideas orally and in writing.

Vanetta says that she is able to relax more and experience less stress when applying her new skills.

**Read for Literacy** is a large community-based literacy program operating in the Toledo, Ohio, area. RFL serves approximately 1750 adult students per year using an equal number of volunteer tutors. In addition to providing instruction in basic literacy skills, RFL offers one-on-one and small-group instruction in advanced reading, writing, and computing, English for Speakers of Other Languages, and a workforce readiness program. The tutors and their students meet in libraries and other public locations once or twice each week.

Deena Kaufman, Executive Director, says,

> It usually takes about three months for a student to move a grade level higher in reading. Students are considered graduates if they can read at a fifth-grade level which is considered functionally literate. At that level, students can read menus, bus schedules, and some articles in the newspaper. About half of the students who seek services from Read for Literacy are people who graduated from high school despite lacking that level of reading ability.
>
> Read for Literacy trains volunteers in accordance with approved literacy training standards. RFL serves referrals from more than thirty social service agencies in the greater Toledo area, including the Lucas County Department of Job and Family Services and the Lucas Metropolitan Housing Authority.
>
> Through these services, Read for Literacy provides adults with the skills they need to enable them to secure decent employment, increase their independence and self-confidence, and become more fully participating citizens of our community.

# Sandy Punches

## Apollo GED

## Lima, Ohio

Sandy Punches entered the Apollo GED program to earn her GED. Sandy wanted to be like her sister who had earned her GED. Sandy and her sister lacked the high school diploma because of the lives they led with their traveling-evangelist father. They traveled across the country, singing and performing, and did not have the opportunity to receive the normal, consistent education that most children have.

Sandy set her goals and attained each one. She set the goal of attaining her GED, and she achieved that goal, but it wasn't easy. The first attempt at the official GED test was not successful. After several years away from the Apollo site, Sandy returned to the GED classroom with renewed enthusiasm and determination to achieve her goal.

Working on and improving her math skills became a daily routine for Sandy. **Joyce Tracy** and **Anna Mumma**, Sandy's Apollo instructors, worked with her to build her confidence as well as her skills in math. So, by the time she was ready to take the test again, Sandy passed with flying colors.

Now, Sandy gives back to the program that assisted her with her goal of attaining her GED. She has become a volunteer in the ABLE/GED classroom. She shares her enthusiasm and joy of learning with the students, as well as the frustration she experienced.

Sandy has also become a notary public so that those students do not have to leave the classroom to have their GED applications signed.

The teachers keep Sandy quite busy, and she is willing to help in any way. As evidence, she was honored for volunteering 395 hours in the 1999-2000 school year.

Sandy is the mother of four daughters, a former Perry Schools PTO president, and a church officer. However, Sandy was not satisfied or finished. Once again, she set her goal. She wanted to become a secretary at Apollo. She entered the Apollo secretarial program in 1997 and completed it in 1998. The ABLE/GED program has hired her as a substitute aide, and Apollo has hired Sandy as a substitute secretary in its secretarial pool.

Sandy's enthusiasm continues as she volunteers whenever she is not on "official business" at Apollo. She continually recruits for both Apollo and the ABLE/GED program.

**Joyce Tracy**, ABLE Coordinator, has this to say about Sandy in her ABLE/GED program, "She sings its praises while we sing hers. Sandy is a leader and a hero to those who surround her. She and other students like her are our best advertisement."

Sandy's daughter is currently enrolled in Apollo's GED program.

**Apollo ABLE/GED** is large adult education program housed in the Apollo Career Center in Lima, Ohio. The Career Center connection offers a wonderful next step for those graduating from the ABLE/GED classroom to pursue further education in a familiar setting. The Apollo ABLE/GED program offers comprehensive adult education services including Basic Skills, GED, and ESOL.

# Elysha Fyffe Dennis

## Penta Career Center, ABLE

## Perrysburg, Ohio

Elysha Fyffe Dennis was diagnosed with learning disabilities in the public schools, and struggled with schoolwork throughout her elementary and high school years. Frustrated and facing personal problems at seventeen, Elysha dropped out of high school.

Elysha and her mom, Sandy Knudson, first came to Penta ABLE four years ago to work on getting their GEDs together. Both signed up for the ABLE classes and regularly attended the Owens' class site with teachers, **Diane Kemer** and **Cindy Covington**.

Elysha was initially frustrated with the class work, but she continued to attend and worked hard. Gradually she began to make progress, and her attitude improved as she became more determined. By the spring semester, Sandy, Elysha's mom, had completed her studies and passed the GED test. Now, one half of the mother-daughter team had the GED.

Elysha was happy for her mother, but she was disappointed that she had not reached her goal. The following fall, Elysha enrolled again in the

Penta ABLE program and continued to pursue her dream by studying diligently. Math was especially difficult for her because of her learning disability. Though she attended regularly, the GED still eluded her.

In January, Elysha joined Penta's Three-in-One program designed for 16-21 year olds who need to complete their education. Again, Elysha found the work challenging, but with the support of her mother and teachers, she dedicated herself to the job of coping with and overcoming her disabilities and personal problems.

After several attempts, Elysha passed the GED and received her Ohio Equivalence Diploma. She went on to continue her education in Penta's Medical Office Technology Program. The next spring, at the Penta ABLE/GED Graduation Ceremony, Elysha Fyffe Dennis was named Student of Year. Elysha is now married and caring for her family which includes her new baby, Josh. With the loving support of her mother, Elysha overcame the obstacles of her disabilities and created her own success story through hard work and perseverance.

The **Penta ABLE Program** is a student-centered learning opportunity for adults who want to continue to improve their learning and earning opportunities. All classes are free and on-site registration is available. Classes are located throughout the community with a selection of times to fit most individuals' schedules. Instructors review skills at a pace that is comfortable for the individual student. Free interest and ability testing is available to help adults explore career or training choices. In addition to preparation for the GED, Penta ABLE also offers reading/writing workshops, resume preparation, ESOL classes, and lifeskills/family literacy programs.

Paula Kline

Upper Valley JVS, ABLE Program

Piqua, Ohio

WOMAN OPENS DOORS

One very important evening a young woman from Pleasant Hill, a small rural community, got into her car and drove to Bradford, Ohio. This very personable woman walked into the Upper Valley JVS and asked for directions to the GED class. She walked down the hall and opened the first door.

Paula Kline had just entered **Virginia Kinney**'s evening GED class. It was difficult for her to come because of a number of home and family circumstances, but Paula was determined. She wanted to be a nurse. She found the classes challenging, but her teacher was patient, friendly, encouraging, and always willing to help.

Ms. Kline said to her instructor, "You did not make me feel stupid. You always encouraged me." Paula frequently thanked Virginia for her patience. Both student and teacher's efforts proved successful. Paula received her GED in 1995. But this was not the end. The foundation for learning was set, and it was time for another door to be opened.

Some time later, Paula went to the local library and met her former teacher, Virginia. As they talked, Virginia asked what Paula was doing now and what her goals were.

Paula confided, "You know, I still want to be a nurse."

Virginia asked her why she was not pursuing that educational goal. Paula thought to herself, "Why not?" Shortly after that meeting, Paula applied for entrance into the Upper Valley JVS LPN program. She was accepted, worked hard, and on July 8, 1999, Paula graduated from LPN training and shortly after, passed her state boards.

Following her LPN licensure, Paula opened a new door and obtained a job as a practicing LPN. Since that fateful day in 1995, Paula Kline has opened numerous doors of personal opportunity.

The **Upper Valley JVS ABLE Program** is a large program that serves a diverse area. The connection with the local JVS is helpful to students like Paula who have education goals beyond the GED. The transition to continuing education is made simpler for these students who are already familiar with the policies, procedures, and location of the ABLE program. Upper Valley JVS, ABLE, provides services to ABE/GED, workplace, corrections, ESOL, and family literacy students.

# Yanina Nagornaya

# &

# Aleksandr Nagornayy

## Toledo Board of Jewish Education

## Toledo, Ohio

## Yanina

Yanina came to the United States in the fall of 1999. She attends classes at the Toledo Board of Jewish Education ABLE. Even though Yanina studied English in her native Ukraine, she felt unable to communicate effectively with Americans and be able to understand them well.

Yanina is a violinist and teaches at the Notre Dame School of Music in Toledo. She also plays with the Lima Symphony Orchestra, the Perrysburg Symphony, and has performed several concerts with the Toledo Symphony. Yanina credits the ABLE ESOL classes at the Toledo Board of Jewish Education with her ability to teach and play music professionally in the United States. "I began to attend ESL classes. All our tutors are very kind, friendly, and patient people. They help us a lot, not only to master English, but to understand better American life, culture, history, and traditions. After one year of attending these classes,

I feel myself much more confident, and I am not afraid to speak with people. Now, I am sure that they can understand me well."

## Aleksandr

Aleksandr also came to the United States in 1999. He had never studied English before arriving in this country. "When I came to the U. S., the ESL classes helped me to learn some basic English. This knowledge helped me to find my first job."

Aleksandr was a champion skater in the Ukraine and has coached skating for twenty years. He now is able to coach figure skating in the United States at Bowling Green State University's Ice Arena. Aleksandr does not speak much English, but he is able to communicate with his students by modeling the techniques he is attempting to teach.

He continues to attend the ESL classes so that he can improve his English. His goal is to speak and understand English better so that he can be a more effective coach. However, Aleksandr has already been successful as the coach of Lisa Chambers (pictured with Aleksandr), the Gold Medal winner at the Holiday Classic Tournament in December 2000.

**Tanya Borochin** is the dedicated instructor in the ABLE program who works tirelessly with the immigrant population to assist them in their assimilation and adaptation to the United States. You see, Tanya is a success story in her own right. She also emigrated to the U.S. from the former Soviet Union seven years ago and began volunteering in the program within five days and was offered the coordinator's position shortly after.

The **Toledo Board of Jewish Education**, ABLE Program, is an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. The program is housed at the Jewish Community Center (JCC) in Sylvania, Ohio. Even though there are few paid staff, they and the tutors who assist serve the ESOL needs of immigrants to this country. The JCC supports this program through use of facilities and equipment to extend the benefits. In addition, the JCC also supports an Adult Institute of Jewish Studies, Community Hebrew School, the Hebrew Academy of Toledo, Hebrew Academy Middle School, and High School for Jewish Studies.

# Northwest Ohio, ABLE Programs

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**Vanguard/Sentinel Tech. Center**
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**Vantage Career Center**
818 Franklin Street
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